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INFO RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT PRIORITY 1162
RUEHDM/AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS PRIORITY 0992
RUEHYN/AMEMBASSY SANAA PRIORITY 0534
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV PRIORITY 1683
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C O N F I D E N T I A L CAIRO 000569

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NEA FOR FO AND NEA/RA

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TAGS: PREL PGOV SY LE IS EG

SUBJECT: ARAB LEAGUE'S HISHAM YOUSEF ON SUMMIT AND "YEMENI INITIATIVE"

REF: A. CAIRO 505
1B. DAMASCUS 198

Classified By: Acting Deputy Chief of Mission William R. Stewart
Reasons: 1.4 (B) and (D)

11. (C) Arab League Chief of Staff Hisham Yousef told us March 23 that the number of heads of state to attend the Arab League Summit in Damascus is not yet final, and he expects it will be in play up until the day of the summit (i.e. March 29). Yousef said that planning for this year's summit "was the most difficult by far." He was nearly certain that Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Jordan would be represented at a lower level than head of state. Yousef opined that the absence of these three leaders would send a "political message" to the Syrians that would not affect the summit itself, but would result in less -- not more -- Syrian flexibility on Lebanon following the summit, arguing that the Syrians will be even less willing to listen to the Egyptians, Saudis, or Jordanians following such a snub. Yousef did not know if Lebanon would attend, or at what level, but thought that there may be clarity by March 25.

12. (U) Arab League Summit schedule: On March 24 there will be a meeting of high officials on economic and trade issues; on March 25 a meeting of high officials for foreign affairs; on March 26 a ministerial meeting for economics and trade; on March 27 a ministerial of foreign ministers; on March 28 heads of state arrive; on March 29-30 the summit will take place.

13. (C) Yousef was not optimistic on prospects for Lebanon progress at the summit. On the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, he said that the Arab League will likely call for a "detailed evaluation" to be issued at an Arab League ministerial in late May or early June (i.e. after the President's expected visit to Israel in May, according to Yousef).

14. (C) Yousef said that the Yemeni effort to mediate between Hamas and Fatah is still in play. According to Yousef, Palestinian Authority President Abbas wants a firm agreement that includes a return of Gaza to the PA. Hamas, however, seeks a "framework agreement" that would include this, but contingent on "continuing dialogue." In addition, Yousef said that Hamas is pushing for any definition of the "pre-June 2007 situation" to include certain terms, including the return of former Prime Minister Haniyeh to the PM position. He opined that the Yemeni effort is driven by lack of progress by traditional mediating powers, such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia, on the intra-Palestinian conflict.

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